



TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
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[Come with me now, I'm going to take you down to the Mayoral Forum on Coast and Water.](#)

We are less than a week away; the excitement is palpable. As we keep saying, over and over, water is [the reason New Orleans exists](#). But what water giveth, water can taketh away; water is both a blessing and a curse for the City of New Orleans. [The mayor should have the scoop on water if they are to effectively govern over our city](#). You've probably heard—from us, no doubt—that we are working with a coalition of organizations to put on the Mayoral Forum on Coast and Water for our city's mayoral candidates. It's coming up on September 30th at 6:00 PM at the University of New Orleans. It's free to attend, and [registration is right here!](#)

Who Will Be on the Front Lines of the Future?

Every spring, Tulane Law students host the Environmental Law & Policy Summit, a two-day gathering of practitioners, policymakers, and advocates here in New Orleans. The [31st Annual Summit](#) will be March 5-7, 2026, and this year's panels will be highlighting the people and ideas shaping what comes next in environmental and water law. The Summit team is now accepting speaker proposals on a rolling basis. If you have a vision worth sharing, or know someone who does, we would love to hear from you. [Submit your proposal or nominate a colleague here!](#)

A Tale of Two Environmental Disasters

Louisiana is [no stranger to disasters](#). For a change, we are talking about manmade disasters rather than the wrath of Mother Nature, but these disasters will still [frighten the Dickens out of you!](#) Louisiana is undoubtedly a hub of industry, and our economy depends on it; however, industry can also bring problems to our fair state.

Our first tale is—quite literally—[explosive](#). Smitty's Supply stored industrial lubricants and other petrochemicals in massive storage tanks in Tangipahoa Parish until August 22nd, when the facility suffered a catastrophic fire and explosion that released petrochemicals in the Tangipahoa River and covered nearby homes and businesses with [oily residue](#). Firefighters were still battling the blaze some two weeks later. Now, [the Louisiana Environmental Action Network is suing Smitty's Supply under the Clean Water Act](#). The EPA has recovered over two million gallons of petrochemical-contaminated water from the Tangipahoa River (which empties into Lake Pontchartrain) since the disaster. Exactly what all is in that water is unknown—deliberately. [EPA is withholding the list of chemicals](#) that were in the fire because it's considered “confidential business information.” Water sampling in the area has not eased concerns either, with high

levels of heavy metals (like arsenic & lead), in addition to hydrocarbons, were detected in samples from a pond near the facility. Smitty's had previously been cited for Clean Water Act violations, as well as allegedly violating its operating permit. This begs the questions: Was this disaster foreseeable? Was it preventable? Only time (and discovery) will tell.

The second tale, although less dramatic, is no less dire. Normally, talk of levees involves a hurricane or high levels on the Mississippi River. In this case, it is alleged that an Atalco facility failed to maintain its own levees, causing a breach that [contaminated the surrounding area with heavy metals and caustics](#) last year. Now, a Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality report shows that water samples taken around Atalco's Gramercy alumina refining facility had 1,400% the arsenic allowed by EPA regulations. The worst part is that the ditches around the facility flow to the Blind River and later wind up in Lake Maurepas. Other samples, taken from outfall canals that drain into the Mississippi River, had pH readings exceeding 9.0, indicating the presence of caustics in the water. Rust-colored water (called "Red Mud" in the bauxite ore refining business) and a rainbow sheen (from leaking diesel-powered pumps) were also observed in the facility's outfall canals. To date, no penalties or fines have been levied against Atalco, [although the state has ordered it to clean up the mess](#). Atalco is probably singing, "[I fought the law](#), and the law gave me a compliance order with no civil penalties or fines"

Coming Up:

[Mayoral Forum on Water & Coast](#); New Orleans, LA;
September 30, 2025

[From the Driftless to the Delta: Rethinking Water
Protections in the Mississippi River Watershed](#);
University of Iowa College of Law, Iowa City, IA;
October 30, 2025

[CRCL Coastal Stewardship Awards](#); Baton Rouge,
LA; November 13, 2025

Water jobs:

[Attorney](#); California Water Resources Control Board; Sacramento, CA

[Editorial Director](#); Mississippi River Basin Ag & Water Desk; Columbia, MO

[Clinical Assistant or Associate Professor](#), Tulane Environmental Law Clinic,
New Orleans, LA

[Operations Coordinator](#); Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana; New
Orleans, LA



The [Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy](#) is a program of the Tulane University Law School. The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and legal stewardship of water.

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